

Justice Pedagogy: The Possibilities and Challenges for ‘Thick’ Citizenship Education amongst Australian School Students

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Certificate of original authorship

I, Keith Heggart, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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ABSTRACT

Civics and citizenship education remains a topical and highly contested field in Australia and around the world. In this thesis the focus is on education seeking to build the capacity of citizens to actively participate in and strengthen democracies as opposed to citizenship that is aligned only to an existing ruling regime and nation-state. The latter is predicated on 'thin' citizenship; that is, on the mechanics and institutions of existing government sanctioned authority, rather than focusing on the issues and ideas that matter to ordinary young people. This thesis explores an alternative and 'thick' approach to civics and citizenship education. In *Justice Citizens*, Australian year 9 students from western Sydney were challenged to investigate a topic in their communities related to the theme of justice. Students researched, planned, shot and edited films related to their chosen topics, which including themes like refugees, bullying, domestic violence and teen pregnancy. These films were exhibited at a film festival, and also published on social media.

Through this process, I engaged in a critical ethnography to identify how this alternative program assisted in the development of active or justice-oriented citizens. In order to formulate these thoughts, I developed a series of research portraits that depicted telling moments from the program, as well as conducting interviews with the students involved and other stakeholders. Based on this data, I developed a framework for critical citizenship education that I have called Justice Pedagogy. Justice pedagogy describes an approach to civics and citizenship education that draws on critical pedagogy in order to encourage the development of justice-oriented citizenship. Justice pedagogy identifies six key features: experiential education, student-led, and action oriented learning, the role of school-community partnerships, the development of critical literacy and advocacy for systemic change. In order to navigate the challenges facing critical pedagogical approaches, justice pedagogy has also drawn on concepts from complexity theory (emergent learning, self-organising systems and distributed decision making).